



Ladies

By INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

Author of "The Sixth Canvasser," etc.

Illustrations by Everett Shinn

"SHE won't want to come here," said Mae Narne. "It stands to reason that she won't. I would n't either. Remember Doll? Does she ever see one of us when she's motoring down the Avenue?"

"But that's all Jerry Montfort," remarked Jackie Dare. "He would n't let her, on his life. Maybe if Doll was left to herself she'd like to come round once in a while."

"I wish you could see the fish eye she handed me the other day I ran into her at Bengel's," interposed Laure Lindsay. "It is n't Jerry. It's Doll herself. Jerry's got her into that smart Long Island set, and she's hanging on by the toe-nails."

"You've said something, Laure," agreed Agnes Bailey. "So did Mae. Doll and Julia are both playing round with ladies now, and they got t' be ladies themselves."

"I don't believe it about Julia," said Jackie Dare. "Julia was some lady herself, now believe me, if she wanted to be."

"Yes," Mae Narne agreed calmly, "there was something different about Julia. She could give the best imitation of a lady and do it the quickest of any one of us."

As far as appearance went,—color, contour, sartorial effect,—Mae Narne was herself so perfect an imitation of a lady that she might have been a duchess. Tall, slender, her figure showed only a bud-dingly rounded fullness in the bust, only a faintly defined salience at the hips.

Golden-blonde, patricianly chiseled, her face showed only a soft pink in the cheek, a rose only slightly deeper in the lip. Her hair lay like a helmet of gold mesh close to her little head, but it revealed all of her classic brow. She was quite without expression, a smooth, lustrous museum piece of pampered female flesh. Her gown was of a heavy raw silk, oyster-white, with insertions of lace. It was a perfect combination of a studied simplicity and a tempered richness. She sat where she could see herself in the dresser glass, and at regular intervals her keen turquoise-blue eyes swept critically the reflection in the mirror. Then, not with the air of a woman of strong personal vanity, but more like a royalty who must be forever on parade, she adjusted a straying lock, smoothed an eyebrow, or pressed to a closer fullness her pink, voluptuous lips.

"I wonder how Julia took it when Vin came back to Broadway. They say he cut a streak through the Tenderloin the last time that cost a thousand dollars a night, and there were three nights of it."

Laure Lindsay contributed these data, but it was evident that they did not much interest her. She sat on the other side of the dresser, so that her reflection also appeared in the mirror. She gazed at herself languidly now and then. She, too, was a tall creature, slim to the point of attenuation, but lissome. The great masses of her shining, brown hair had been pressed flat to her head, then laid in wide, knife-sharp waves over her forehead and

temples and down on her cheeks. Her eyes, like melted goldstone, were set between lashes of an extraordinary thickness and under brows that had been shaved to the merest penciling and shaped to the sweep of a bird's wing. She, also, was without expression, although she smiled always. That smile was a mere mechanical trick. It was only a pearly glimmer, and she had a way of making it seem to tremble into existence. Big mock pearls that matched her teeth in tint clung to her ear-lobes. A chain of mock pearls, which constantly engaged her long, brown fingers, hung about her neck. She wore a gown of creamy linen that nuns had embroidered, and a lustrous sweater of a dull green silk.

"What crowd 's Vin running with now?" asked Agnes Bailey.

"Guenn Nevers and the Spring Palace set," Laure answered.

"I 'd like to see Julia," Jackie Dare said, "and I bet she 'd like to see us. You can't tell me she 's happy living in the country, locked in with that bunch of fish eyes. She 'd eat us up if she got the chance."

Jackie Dare was dark; indeed, she was several shades darker—blackier, rather—than Laure Lindsay. She was coarsely featured, swarthyly thatched, sallow, but she showed a certain squaw-like picturesqueness. Her lips were heavy and thick, but as red as blood. She had the look of a suppressed volcano, as though a seething flood of experience was all the time trying to break through her thick skin, to burn itself upon her expression. And it was as though only constant mechanical care of that skin—creaming, massaging, vibratory treatment—held that flood at bay. Two gold flashes glittering from the large, white regularity of her smile accented this look of lava-suppression. She wore a long sport-coat of orange corduroy.

"Well, all you got t' do," Agnes Bailey said impatiently, "is 'phone. She can't any more than throw us down. We 'll have t' stay four hours in this hole, a thousand miles from a drink, and we 've got t' do something or bu'st. I bet Vin

would welcome us with screeches of joy. Is Vin home?"

"I should say not, little one," answered Mae Narne. "Vin is in gay Paree, hitting it up. Where I wish I was this very minute."

"How many are there in this Wrighterson push?" Laure Lindsay asked. "Do you know anything about them, Jackie?"

"Not much," answered Jackie. "Only what I read in 'Talk.' There 's only old Mrs. Wrighterson, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Wrighterson, beside Julia. Old man Wrighterson 's in a nut-house somewhere, incurable; been there for years."

"How 've they treated Julia?" Mae Narne asked.

"I don't know," answered Jackie, "except that they put up a swell front of doing the right thing. Whether there was anything behind the front but hot air—well, *by me*. Just as soon as Vin married Julia, he notified his family by wire. They got a wire back from Mrs. Wrighterson in no time, saying she 's coming on to New York that night. She came, bringing Mrs. Edward Wrighterson with her. They stayed in New York a day or two, and then they all went back to Boston. I 've never seen Julia since. I got a letter or two from her, but it was n't any good our trying to write. Julia *can't* write letters, and I *won't* write them. All I know is that later they came to Medwin here, lugging Julia along with them. And she 's been here ever since."

"She 's never left this hole since!" Agnes Bailey exclaimed incredulously. "Ring off, Jackie!"

"That 's what I 'm telling you," asserted Jackie.

"Say," said Mae Narne, covering the tip of an ear that threatened to lift a rose-pink arc through the unruffled smoothness of her golden hair, "was n't somebody telling me that Vin did a swell devoted husband impersonation for a while?"

"Sure," answered Laure. "Only a bit, though, in the first act. He was all to the goody-goody, sweetie-cutie, mother's own darling boy, wifie's own devoted lit-

tle hubby for about one year. Besides, they 'd lost a lot of money just then,—the Wrightersons,—and he had t' be good. Then some old gink of an uncle died and left Vin a fresh wad. He 's been scattering golden showers over the Tenderloin ever since, and, believe me, Broadway got the thickest coat of red paint it 's had in some moons when Vin hit the trail again. Take it from me, he 's some slick little spender when he gets started."

"Edward Wrighterson," Agnes Bailey repeated meditatively—"that has a kind of familiar holler. Who the devil is Edward Wrighterson? Did n't I read something?"

"Sure, you did," answered Jackie. "Vin's only brother. He was thrown from his horse fox-hunting, all smashed up. Paralyzed now; lives in a wheelchair."

"Who 'd he marry?" Mae asked.

"There is a story about that," Jackie explained. "Regular drama; ought to be filmed. They say that Edward Wrighterson had always been crazy about this girl, but she did n't care a rap for him. Her father had a lot of money,—made it in lumber out in the high timber,—but he got into some fierce deal, and it looked as if he not only was going to lose every red cent, but he 'd go to the pen, too. Wrighterson handed him everything he had. He saved the old guy, but they 've both been poorer than poverty ever since. The girl married Edward Wrighterson out o' gratitude, they say."

"Fool!" commented Mae Narne. She reached for a gold cigarette-case on the dresser, lighted a cigarette, puffed meditatively. She kept her critical, turquoise-blue gaze on the mirror, and every movement of arm, wrist, and fingers was heavy with studied grace. She looked like some half-seen vision, her cool, blonde coloring gleaming, her frail, regular chiseling cutting through the soft smoke. "Any brats—I mean kiddies?"

"No," Jackie answered.

"Let 's call Julia up!" Agnes suggested. "Muggie won't be back before dark. It 'll take all that time to get the machine re-

paired and, say, I can't stand this." She went to the window and gazed out on the quiet street. "If there 's one thing I hate, it 's sitting in a hotel room. It gives me a blue bean quicker than anything. Let 's 'phone her now before she gets away somewhere. All she can do is throw us down."

"She won't turn us down," prophesied Jackie.

"Sure, she will," contradicted Laure.

"Of course she will," echoed Mae.

"Where 'd Julia come from?" Laure asked.

"God only knows," Jackie answered, "and He won't tell. The first thing Julia knows about herself, she 's in a foundling-asylum, just left on somebody's door-step in a basket. That 's all she ever finds out. The next thing, she 's about fifteen, out o' the convent, pretty as she could stick, and got t' do for herself. She tries it in a shop for a while at six bones per, with a fat kike of a floor-man trying to get gay. Then, by accident, she gets into a lawyer's office at eight bones per. She can't do anything, of course, but old Sideburns, who runs the joint, don't expect her to do anything but go through the motions. He 's got her there for a different purpose. When she quits him,—it 's quit or give up,—she gets a chance to go in a musical comedy. I met her in 'The Girl from the Submarine' company. We were pals together until Vin married her."

"She could have married lots of swells, could n't she?" Agnes asked.

"Sure, she could n't," Mae answered with satisfaction.

"Not so 's you 'd notice it," Laure reinforced her with an equal sense of satisfaction.

"Well, Julia was about like the rest of us," Jackie said, "except maybe she was a little more like a lady, as you just said, Mae. But Julia was always a good fellow and a sport. Money never meant anything to her. I know that. In those days we were both washing our underwear overnight, hanging our handkerchiefs to dry on the window-panes, and cooking our breakfasts over the gas. Of

course Glen Davenport was after her, and she was pretty stuck on Glen. Many's the time I've heard him beg her to marry him. But he was always pie-eyed, and Julia said she'd never say yes until he asked her sober. He never did, though, and pretty soon he marries that rich Wel-born girl from Chicago. He tried to come around after he was married, but, take it from me, there was nothing doing. Then there was Dan Whitman. And I believe that was all. Oh, Vin knew all about it. When he asked her to marry him, and he was sober all right, she calls me into the room and tells him all this in my presence. Vin was some sport, believe me; I've always liked him since. He says: 'I'd hate to have to tell you my past, Julia. This'll be all to that.' Jackie paused. "But Julia did n't leave anything out."

"Fool!" Mae commented again. "Just think of deliberately giving your husband something on you!"

"Oh, let's call her up!" entreated Agnes. Agnes was little and round and blonde and pretty. She was a creature of light, though also of flesh. Her soft, flaxen hair, fluttering in hundreds of tendrils all over her head, emitted glints of light whenever the sun touched it. Her china-blue eyes poured light through her curly lashes until it sparkled off their tips. Similarly, her little china-white teeth seemed to flash light. And at all times the network of dimples that played between eyes and lips seemed to catch the brilliance of the one and pass it on to the other. Her suit of navy-blue taffeta was a marvel of simplicity; the white blouse that topped it, a cobweb of fineness.

"You 'phone, Mae," said Laure. "Your voice sounds so swell on the wire. I've always noticed it."

"All right," Mae answered. She arose with her slow grace, sauntered to the telephone, took up the slim, country telephone book. She stood as tall and impassive as a lily, one hand holding her cigarette, the other turning the leaves. "Ain't it a riot?" she commented with what seemed for her the maximum of humorous appreciation.

"A thousand little burgs with ten numbers to the burg. Medwin! Medwin! Here it is. Wrighterson, Wrighterson, Wrighterson. I've got them." She took up the telephone-receiver. "Hello!" she called stridently. "Give me Medwin 619, please. Yes, Medwin. Yes, 619. Thank you." She dropped the receiver. "He says he'll call me. Say," she went on, still in the accent of her social undress, "I think that clerk's just a shade too fresh. I guess I'll have to hand him one before I leave this near-Waldorf." The bell rang. She took the receiver again. Her voice, clear, quiet, exquisitely impersonal, poured like a flood of ice-water into the receiver.

"Is this Medwin 619?" It was evident that Miss Narne was addressing a social inferior. Her tone took the correct shade of command, alleviated with patronage. "Thank you. I would like to speak with Mrs. Wrighterson. No, Mrs. Vincent Wrighterson. Yes, thank you. Yes." She turned to her companions, pressing the receiver against her shoulder. Her voice dropped again to an easy, slangy accent. "She's in all right. A swell English accent with a butler attachment has just gone to get her. There she is! Hello!" Her voice became icily exquisite again. "Is this Mrs. Vincent Wrighterson? Good morning, and how do you do, Julia! This is Mae Narne. Yes, it is. It does seem strange, does n't it? That's *sweet* of you. There's a crowd of us over here, Julia: Jackie Dare, Laure Lindsay, and Agnes Bailey. We were motoring with Muggie Nichols. The machine broke down, and we're stalled here for three or four hours. We wondered if you'd like to come over here this afternoon."

She listened.

"No, not for dinner. Yes, they're right here. I'll ask them. Girls,"—she turned about,—"Julia wants us to come over there for tea. She says she'll send the motor for us in half an hour. Would you like to go?"

"Crazy to," answered Agnes at once.

"I certainly would," replied Laure.

"Let me talk with Julia." Jackie snatched the receiver out of Mae's hands.

"SAY, it was fierce Jackie's not being able to come," Agnes remarked three quarters of an hour later in the automobile. "Was n't it rotten about that headache? I'm scared. Are n't you?"

"Not at all," Mae answered coolly. "It would take something more than the Wrighterson family to feeze me."

"Or me," echoed Laure. "Just the same, I'm going to do as good an impersonation of a lady as I can put over. Mary Moore in 'The Mollusk' will be my model."

"Mae, you 'd better do that sketch you flashed day before yesterday with that farm-house bunch," Agnes suggested, dimpling. "Don't you remember when we stopped to get some water? Southern stuff. Plantation crowded with slaves before the war. Remember, nobody in your family ever did a stroke of work or earned an honest penny. Remember, the bluest blood of Virginia flows in your veins. Your real name's Lee or Carteret or something like that, ain't it? I think that 'll make a great splash."

"Not a chance," Mae answered contemptuously. "Too raw. That rough stuff will do with boobs, but you've got to soft pedal with real swells. Don't say anything about anything."

"And Laure can do her best monologue, the daughter of a clergyman, a graduate of Bryn Mawr?" Agnes suggested, with a twinkle.

"I should say not," Laure answered with disgust. "That would n't get me anywhere with the Wrightersons. The thing to do is to keep shut up on family dope."

"Well, that's all right for me," Agnes answered. "I can't be anything but myself. I'd laugh my head off if I tried to pull any of that stuff. I was born in Brooklyn of poor, but disreputable, parents, and I don't care who knows it."

"Well, if you can outgrow the Brooklyn," said Mae, "the disreputable parents will take care of themselves."

"Say, the side drops of this road are pretty good!" Agnes exclaimed suddenly. "I often think I belong in the nut-house. I like the country."

Mae and Laure emitted twin groans ostentatiously crowded with disgust. They looked with lack-luster eyes on the passing scene. Agnes, however, turned and twisted in an effort to see both sides of the road at once. They were rolling through Medwin's principal street. They had just come to the village green, a big triangle of smooth grass, broken at its flat end by a pool covered with lily-pads, and accented at its point by a bronze statue erected to the men of Medwin that had fallen in the Revolution. The green was edged with a triangle of wine-glass elms, and about that triangle, inclosing the road, ran another bigger triangle, also of wine-glass elms. Opposite the pool was the white, beautifully proportioned, slender-spired colonial church. Opposite the monument was the colonial town hall, a little like a church with its green-shuttered windows and its chaste Corinthian pillars. The big, white houses that looked upon the green were of colonial cut, plus the additions that intervening generations had brought.

"Gee! How I hate those white buildings!" Mae said with a shudder. "They give me the willies."

"One month in one of them, and it would be me to the nut-house," admitted Laure.

"Say, do you know I kind o' like them," Agnes admitted with shame.

About the green the houses sat in friendly fashion, close to the road, as though to invite the whole world to an ample colonial hospitality. But as the road drew away from the common, the houses drew farther and farther from it. Gradually the spaces between the houses grew wider. After a while only faint suggestions of cultivation here and there indicated that there were any houses at all.

"Say, they could improve this burg some by putting a trolley-line along here," Mae remarked.

"And electric lights," added Laure.

"Say, I kind o' like it just the way it is," said Agnes.

"Think of living here!" Mae went on. "Little old Forty-second Street for mine!"

"Me!" said Laure. "Build me a cabin where Forty-second, Seventh Avenue, and Broadway crowd together. That 's all I want."

Mae leaned forward slightly until across Agnes her eyes met Laure's.

"1912 model," she whispered, sweeping an eloquent glance about the motor.

Laure's dexter finger, long, slim, olive, the nails manicured to the breaking-point, indicated spots in the upholstery where the leather had worn away. "You have to have all the class in the world to afford to look as fierce as this."

"Say, if I lived here, I would n't climb into a machine once," said Agnes. "I 'd hoof it everywhere."

They turned into the wide roadway of an estate that appeared bounded by stone walls as far as the eye could reach. The road was as hard as a whetstone. Now and then came the gurgle of a brook, the ripple of a tiny cascade. The road wound, but always kept its ample width, always was as hard as though cut from the living rock, and as smooth as though sand-papered. Another turn, and they came in sight of the house.

It was a big house, yellow trimmed, with green shutters. Originally, perhaps, it had been a square building whose geometric lines were typical of the rigors of colonial architecture and whose doorway, a combination of fan-light, graceful leaded side panels, exquisite woodwork, ancient brass knocker, was typical of its decorative mitigations. Wings had been added to the original structure, but they were in perfect keeping and apparently not modern. At one side were gardens with summer-houses; at the others, orchards and grape arbors. In front was a huge crescent-shaped area of lawn, so closely shorn that the wind could not stir its nap. At irregular intervals across its golden-green, enormous copper beeches drooped their branches. Three women sat

sewing about a table on the lawn. As the motor came in sight, one of them rose, and hastened to meet them at the edge of the lawn.

"That 's Julia," said Mae. "She 's doing her hair differently."

"She made the dress all right," remarked Laure. "She 's thin."

"Ain't she a pippin!" Agnes commented.

"O girls," Julia called as she drew near, "you don't know how glad I am to see you!"

The motor stopped. The chauffeur alighted, opened the door, and the girls descended.

"Well, hello, Julia!" Mae called.

"You 're looking fine," added Laure; "I never saw you so freckled."

"You 're a sight for sore eyes," contributed Agnes.

Julia Wrighterson was so tall that in actual inches she overtopped the tall Mae Narne and the taller Laure Lindsay, but about her shoulders there was a Clytie-like droop that considerably reduced her stature. She was a white-skinned girl—so white that the freckles to which Laure referred stood out like a dash of amber rain. At every point her features stopped just short of the classic, but made, nevertheless, a fascinating piquancy of this irregularity. She had a rich, warm mouth—a deep wine-crimson—which also seemed to droop, and eyes, rich and warm, too, of a thickly fringed, star-filled violet.

Her long, straight gown was made of a soft silk, with a figure which consisted of three flowers. Her parasol was of the same material. Reproductions of the three flowers trimmed her frail, deeply perforated lace hat.

"Now come to meet the others," she said.

The others were presumably Mme. Wrighterson and Mrs. Edward Wrighterson.

"Mother," Julia said when they reached the shade of the copper-beech, "and Daphne, let me introduce my friends Miss Narne, Miss Lindsay, and Miss Bailey. My mother Mrs. Wrighterson and my

sister Mrs. Edward Wrighterson." She paused while a quintet of civil murmurs entangled, disentangled, and died away. Then "Oh!" Julia wailed suddenly, "where is Jackie?"

"Jackie had a severe headache," Mae answered in accents that were a replica of the severe oral elegance with which she had inundated the telephone. "She wished me to present her apologies."

"Oh!" Julia cried, "my heart was set on seeing Jackie! But perhaps I can go back with you."

"Ah, here comes the tea," said Mme. Wrighterson. "I hope you are all ready for it. I confess I have two vices, my coffee at seven in the morning and my tea at five in the afternoon."

"We are companions in misery," Laure admitted gracefully. "I confess to the same two weaknesses."

"Tea!" exclaimed Agnes. "I love it! My sister always says, 'Why don't you bathe in it?' I got a license to like it all right. My grandmother was a' Irish woman from County Sligo. She always had a pot boiling on the stove from the moment she got up until she went to bed."

Mme. Wrighterson's eyes, old and faded, but of a soft brown, had passed non-committally observant from Mae's cold, pale pink, golden blondness, like a rose in ice, and Laure's vivacious, glittering darkness, like a butterfly in amber, to Agnes's frank Celtic sparkle. There her gaze seemed to catch fire.

"I should agree with you on that," she laughed. "My mother never left the house or came back into it without her cup of tea. I have traveled in County Sligo—a beautiful country."

"Oh, granny was full of stories about it. I often thought I'd go and see it some time," Agnes said.

The tea-wagon, which, guided by an old white-haired man in shabby livery, had been approaching noiselessly over the thick turf, stopped in front of Mme. Wrighterson. The tea-set was Sheffield plate of an old luster; in places the copper had worn through the silver. The dishes were an old moss-rose pattern of

porcelain; in spots the roses had washed away.

"Thank you, Broke," said Mme. Wrighterson. "Did the honey come?"

"Yes, mem," answered Broke; "a few moments ago, mem."

"I don't know anything more difficult to eat or more malapropos at tea than honey," Mme. Wrighterson exclaimed apologetically. "But Mrs. Blodgett—I always call her my 'bee-woman'—raises such wonderful honey! She sent word this morning that she had some for me. I thought you might like some of it."

The girls murmured various forms of assent.

Her eyes on her guests, Mme. Wrighterson went on talking, but all the time her withered, old hands were moving among the china and silver—moving with deft, accustomed touches. She poured the tea into the thin cups. She scooped the honey out of the little glass jar in which it had come, and put it upon the thin plates. Broke handed these about. He passed thin little sandwiches of buttered bread and thin little cookies covered with sugar. "Don't get any of this honey on your pretty frocks," she admonished the entire group, "or I shall never forgive myself for giving it to you."

She was a large woman. Even sitting in her chair, her body had a notable dignity of carriage. Her hair was quite white, and her skin, old and mothly and yellow, was crisscrossed with scores of faint wrinkles. But the soul of her was young; it shone through her quiet smile in the true spirit of friendliness and through her brown eyes in the true spirit of understanding. She wore a gown of so old a style that it had almost an antique connotation—a light silk with green lines alternating with black lines on an ivory background. A long fichu of Maltese lace was pinned at the throat and waist with huge brooches of Scotch cairngorm. About her shoulders was a cape of ermine, thin and mothly and yellow like her skin.

"I shall never outgrow my enjoyment of honey," she said after a while. "I love it."

"So do I," agreed Mrs. Edward Wrighterson. "You and I are twins, Mother, when it comes to honey. And this is the best I ever tasted. I should think the 'bee-woman' fed her bees on *bar-le-duc*, sugared violets, maple-syrup, and champagne."

Daphne Wrighterson was a little older than Julia, but her figure was much more mature. It flowed from the round neck and square shoulders into warm, maternal-looking breasts and swelled from the round waist into a wide, maternal-looking lap. Her hair, bushy-coarse, like thick, crinkled gold thread, parted in the middle and arched across her ears, was drawn into a big wad at her neck. But what one really looked at was her eyes. Set under a forehead of a white broadness and over cheeks of a pink roundness, wide apart, wide open, gray, those eyes shone with a gentle sadness.

"I 'm gobbling," she went on. "I am so sorry that it 's happened the way it has, but I have invited the children from the poor-farm to come here this afternoon. I am expecting them any moment now. It means, of course, that I shall have to devote myself to them for the rest of the afternoon."

"I 'm sorry, too, Daphne," Julia said. "Perhaps we 'll get time to come round back and watch the children playing for a while. Daphne gives them a wonderful party every summer," she explained to her friends, "and they all look forward to it as the event of the whole year."

Julia was seated, curved like a crescent moon, in one of the big chairs. The chair arm supported one elbow, and her long, slender hand supported her cheek. Drooping thus, it was to be seen that her face showed a certain wanness—shadows too heavily drawn under the violet eyes, hollows too deeply rutted in the white cheeks. Her eyes went from Mae to Laure to Agnes and clung wistfully to each of them.

"There, there they come now!" exclaimed Mme. Wrighterson.

A touring-car filled with children shot into sight on the drive. It was followed

by another, filled also, but with grown people holding babies. The motors followed the drive up to the entrance of the house. Daphne jumped to her feet. She wore a gown which she might have made herself, of white organdie with pink roses on it. About her shoulders was a scarf of the same material. In the little V made by her modestly turned-away neck hung a fine gold chain suspending a small pendant of a delicate rose-pink coral.

"Oh, I 'm so sorry to go!" she said regretfully. "But if you can, come back and see what we 're doing. We do have such good times!"

She ran to meet the motor. The children had in the meantime alighted. The grown people alighted. They all crowded about Daphne.

Suddenly a wheeled chair, manned by Broke, appeared in the doorway, and descended by gentle gradations from the steps to the lawn. The man in it—even at that distance it could be seen that he was young, white-faced, weak—waved a hand in their direction.

"Oh," Mme. Wrighterson exclaimed in a pleased voice, "I am so glad that Edward decided to come out. My son has been an invalid for some months," she explained to her guests, "and sometimes we have a great deal of difficulty in persuading him to get out into the air. He 'll enjoy the children, though, Julia. He always does."

The procession, the man in the wheeled chair at its head, the children capering in a group about him, Daphne following, the grown people chattering in a group about her, disappeared around the corner of the house. It had scarcely vanished when Daphne reappeared, carrying a little white bundle over each arm.

"She 's bringing us the twins," Mme. Wrighterson explained, looking much amused. "They 're the pets of the poor-farm. They are about six months old, and the mother and father are both dead—poor little creatures!"

Drinking their tea, they watched Daphne's soft, slow, preoccupied approach over the velvet lawn.

"Are n't they lovely?" she said as soon as she was in their group again. "I had to show them to you at once." She sat down, and offered the twins for their inspection. Her big eyes had filled with a tenderness that turned their deep, wide-irised grayness to wells of light. "O you little angels! How I wish you were mine!" Her voice had sunk to a mere breath, as though loudness of any kind might blast the little human buds on her lap.

The three girls surveyed the round, red-faced, blinky-eyed little creatures.

"Charming little things!" Mae said with delicate enthusiasm.

"Girls?" Laure asked in a tone prettily interrogative.

"No," Daphne answered, "boys. As you would very soon discover if you had to take care of them for an afternoon."

"Say, they 're corkers!" Agnes approved heartily. "I like a husky kid."

"You little ducks," Daphne continued her apostrophe, "how am I going to let you go home to-day?"

Mme. Wrighterson's eyes, resting on her daughter-in-law's illuminated face, turned somber.

"We shall have to move the poor-farm up here, Daphne," was all she said. She spoke in a tone of gentle raillery.

"Now I must get back," Daphne said blithely. "Edward 's flying some marvellous Chinese kites for the children. I 'm having a perfectly lovely time, Mother." It was as though she deliberately packed her voice with sweet gaiety.

"Now for some more tea!" Mrs. Wrighterson exclaimed. "Julia, I 'm neglecting your friends shamefully."

The girls repudiated this in various high-bred disclaimers.

"And," continued Mme. Wrighterson, "I had forgotten all about the cheese. I 'm probably prouder of this cheese than anything that 's produced on the place. You see," she went on, while with her deft touches she dug it from a little earthen jar and transferred it to their plates, "almost all the cooking receipts that I use were invented in the Wrighterson

family. The Wrighterson women have all been famous housekeepers. My husband's great-grandmother wrote a cook-book. It was in the days when, whatever a woman wrote, she must start by turning out a cook-book. Sabrina Wrighterson stopped there; she had no literary ambitions. But all the Wrighterson women had the knack of inventing wonderful food combinations. And so we have a big, old book in the family filled not only with Sabrina Wrighterson's cooking rules, but with her daughters' and her granddaughters'. For generations in the Wrighterson family the jellies, preserves, piccalillis, relishes, and, indeed, pies and cakes, jumbles and cookies, have all been made according to the receipts in this book. So, you see, I never had a chance to exercise any originality. I used to tell my husband that there was no knowing how inventive I might have been if I had n't felt it a point of honor to follow the family traditions. But I did do one thing: I invented a cheese. It 's a very simple, ordinary cheese made from cream. My invention is the seasoning. I put twelve different herbs in it. I raised them in my garden."

"How very interesting!" said Mae. She nibbled the cracker which she had anointed delicately with the cheese. "It 's very delicious."

"Delightful flavor!" agreed Laure.

"I have n't tasted anything like this," said Agnes, "since I was a little girl and living in the country. We had a cow then, and sometimes we had more milk than we knew what to do with. Granny always used to make cheese of what was left over. You 'd have liked my granny, Madam Wrighterson. She was a harp for fair."

"I 'm sure I would," Mme. Wrighterson said. Again that pleasant light filled her eyes as her gaze met Agnes's. "Julia is getting to be a famous cook. She helped me put up everything last year. She has a natural knack for such things. And you enjoyed it, did n't you, Julia?"

"I never had so much fun in my life," Julia admitted.

"Oh, here comes Daphne again," Mme. Wrighterson said indulgently, "with another baby."

"Did you ever see anything so adorable in all your life?" Daphne demanded as she approached. This time she knelt among them on the lawn. Again her eyes filled with that soft loveliness that was half joy and half sorrow. Again her voice sank to that faint ripple, half awe, half soothing. She pulled her scarf away from its face.

It was a black baby, with eyes so bright that the spectators involuntarily smiled. The baby smiled, too, showing four tiny white teeth.

"He looked like the little black babies that Edward and I saw in Bermuda," Daphne explained, "when we were on our honeymoon. I was so wild about them that Edward offered to buy me one, and when he found that no mother would sell her baby, to steal one."

Again that somberness dulled Mme. Wrighterson's soft eyes as she looked at her daughter-in-law.

"Yes, we must move the poor-farm up here, Daphne," was again all she said.

Daphne departed, still murmuring her little language.

Mae looked at her diamond-incrusted wrist-watch.

"I 'm sorry, but I 'm afraid we must be going," she said in regretful accent.

"Yes," Laure added, with no diminution of her breeding, "I think we ought to get back to poor, dear Jackie."

"I hope you can come with us, Julia," Agnes pleaded. "Jackie 'll be crazy to see you."

"Oh, I 'm so sorry!" Julia said. "I can't now. I had forgotten that I had promised Daphne to help later in the little play the children are giving. They 're depending on me, you see. But later I 'll call you up. If you 're not gone then, I 'll come over. Don't go early." Again her eyes clung to her friends' faces. "Oh, don't go unless you have to." She looked at them longingly.

Mae shook hands with Mme. Wrighterson in the elegant way that she had once

made famous in a musical comedy; Laure followed with a manner only a degree less distinguished; Agnes shook hands vigorously, but with warmth. "I 've had a swell time," she said.

"I am delighted to have met you all," Mme. Wrighterson announced, "and I am so sorry that you could not have stayed to dinner. But perhaps you will come some other time."

"We shall be charmed," Mae answered for the trio.

Julia accompanied her friends across the lawn to the motor.

"WELL, how do you like it, Julia?" Mae asked when they were out of ear-shot. Her tones had shed their high-bred elegance and had taken on an edge of keen inquiry. "Pretty slow—what?"

"Yes, it is pretty slow," Julia admitted, "sometimes."

"Where 's Vin?" Laure asked abruptly.

"At Monte Carlo," Julia answered.

"Is n't he the rotter?" Agnes exclaimed, and then in a burst: "Say, Julia, for the love o' Mike, why don't you beat it? Not that it ain't pretty soft in some ways, but you 'll die here. You know you can always get a job and another swell husband, if that 's your lay. Friedenstein was saying only the other day there never was nobody like you. Come over to the hotel to-night, and we 'll take you back to New York in the car. Muggie 's a good sport; he 'll stake you if you need money. And you know my place or Jackie's is always open to you. If you pull it off that way, there won't be any trouble. They 'll send your clothes after you, and that 'll end it. Vin 'll let you get your divorce. He 'd be square about that all right."

Julia did not speak for a moment, but in that pause the wanness of her coloring visibly accented itself.

"Take Mrs. Wrighterson," she said presently, as though soliloquy had interrupted itself to become monologue. "She was very happy with Vin's father for the first fifteen years of their married life, then he went insane. He 's in the asylum now, ten miles from here. Regularly once

a week, as sure as the clock, she pays him a visit. She could have lived in New York or London or Paris—anywhere—and had a swell time,—they've got friends all over the world,—she did n't, though. She stuck. Take Daphne. Because he stood by her father, she married a man that she really did n't care for. In the first year of their married life, just as she's beginning to love him, he gets himself all twisted up in a hunting accident. He'll never be any good again. He's only the shell of a man. He's a gentleman, though, and a dead-game sport. He gets wild spells, when he begs her to leave him and find some man that can give her the children she wants. But she's stuck, too. When I married Vin, and he telegraphed his mother, she took the next train over to New York. I sat in the hotel room, dressed up like a—I can see those Tenderloin clothes now—frightened to death, white, trembling. When her knock came on the door, I could barely open it, my knees knocked together so. She just reached out her arms and said, 'Is this Vincent's wife?' and kissed me. That's all there was to it then; that's all there's ever been to it. Never a question or a hint or a catty knock of any kind. Of course Vin's acting like the devil; but in his heart he does n't want to lose me. I know that. He needs me. He knows that. And I know it, too. It's hell here sometimes—I mean the dullness. Some nights it seems that if I could just doll up once more and beat it down to Morgan's grill, I'd— But I'm going to stick, too."

Jackie Dare sat in a little summer-house on the grounds of the hotel. Across the little rustic table from her lounged a young man whose appearance perfectly explained his sobriquet. His marked facial peculiarity was supplemented by a sartorial spectacularity. His expression of great good nature was not confined to his bulging eyes or his eccentric profile; it seemed to exude from his very figure.

"Muggie, give me some ski," Jackie ordered. "I have n't had a drink in this temperance hole since you left."

Muggie drew a generous flask from an inner pocket. He unscrewed the top, poured some of the contents into it, and handed it to his companion. She drank it with a single gulping intake.

"That deed of kindness will save your soul from the everlasting pit, Muggie, old boy," she promised her companion, visibly cheered by his ministrations.

"Thanks," replied Muggie. "Have another! Say, why are n't you taking in those swell works with the rest of the bunch? I thought you and Julia were pals. Was n't any split there, was there?"

"I should say not," said Jackie. "Put that in your nut and remember it, Muggie. Anybody'd better try splitting the earth in two before he tries to make trouble between me and Julia. But, Muggie, how could I go? I did n't want to gum Julia's game. The other three could put up a refined front for as long as an hour; but me—what would a truck horse like me do? I'd rather see Julia than my dead mother; but I love her too much to hurt her."

